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# A LETTER from HOLLAND,

TOUCHING

# Liberty of Conscience, &c.

*Dear SIR,*

I Received yours of the 10th *Current (Stilo veteri)* and cannot but *smile* to see you seem so much concern'd at the *Papers*, you say, are frequently transmitted from hence; for I assure my self, you know the World better than to be really startled at such *petit efforts*: However, since you are pleased to *Command* (for under that Character I must ever receive the least Intimation of your desires) my mean Sentiments on that Subject, I shall deliver my Thoughts with all the *freedom* due to our *old Friendship*, and the Secrecy of a *Private Letter*, for *such* I hope your *Prudence* will make it, as fore-seeing how much it may otherwise redound to *my Prejudice* from some, that will neither *speak Truth* themselves, nor endure to *hear* it from others.

You are not ignorant that the *best Princes*, and even for their *best Actions*, have been traduc'd and scandaliz'd by *lavish Tongues*, the petulancy of misimploy'd *Wit*, and mercenary *malitious Pens*. Therefore the best advis'd *Statesmen*, have always thought such *Invectives* worthy none of their *passions*, but *scorn* and *neglect*; *Augustus* never spoke more like himself, than in that Expression to *Tiberius*——*Noli hâc in re indagare, & nimium Indignari Quempiam esse qui de me loquatur Malè, satis est enim si hoc habemus, ne quis malè facere possit.*

I need not give you the Character of the *Instruments* that chiefly contrive and promote the Libels you complain of; What may not be expected from Persons *defeated* in their Nefarious Attempts? Frustrated of their Ambitious *hopes*? Acted by Malice, Envy, Want and *Despair*? I believe you never knew many of them much Celebrated at home for any extraordinary *strict Piety* or *Moral Vertue*; and I can assure you, we do not find by their general Conversation here, any great Inclinations they have to live *Saints*, or die *Martyrs*. What Notorious false Stories? What gross Forgeries (under the Notion of *Intercepted Letters*, &c.) have they not Industriously advanc'd and spread abroad? Nay, some of them have attempted to abuse Heaven it self, and suborn the *Stars* to Countenance their Impostures, whilst they divert themselves over a *full-crown'd Rummer*, in boasting how many silly Souls in *England* they have bubled with these fulsome Shams——Yet *these* are the men that are so wonderously transported with Zeal, for the Preservation of a *Religion*, which they always were, and continue to be a *scandal* to.

But if (over-looking their Immodest Reflections, &c.) you consider the main scope and design of these Papers, is it not altogether to support the *Penal* and *Test-Laws*, and to prevent the free Exercise of *Religion* being *settled* among you? And on what *Topicks* do they proceed, but little *Sophisms*, adapted only to Amuse and Inflame the Vulgar? And begging the main Question, [*viz.* Taking it for granted, that if those Laws be removed, there will not, or cannot be other sufficient Security for the *Protestant Religion* establish'd in their stead] which as it is altogether a *mis-stating* of the case; so it seems somewhat unaccountable, that the very same Persons, who e'er while complain'd so much of *Oppression* for matters of *Religion*, or at least the fears on't, and were so fond of *Liberty of Conscience*, that to obtain it, they broke through all the Bounds of *Duty* and *Prudence*, and ventur'd upon a desperate *Rebellion* (apparently threatning the utter Ruine of their Native Country) should now on a sudden be so extreamly *averse thereunto*, when 'tis freely *offer'd* to be setled by Law to all Posterity, under as firm *Security* as the Wisdom of a Nation can invent?

Therefore, tho I know Peoples *Passions* have a strange Byas on their *Judgments*, yet a Wise Man may be tempted to suspect something *more* in this case, and that the Humour is fomented and encouraged by the secret Influences of some *powerful Interest*; for 'tis *That* commonly moves the Wheels, though *Religion* may be made the pretence: What's the reason so many cry'd out against *Machiavel*? Not so much perhaps, for the badness of his *Maxims* (since they are every day practised by such as declaim loudest against 'em) but ill Politicians were angry that he should divulge their *Arcana*, and make those Mysteries *common*, which they designed to engross to themselves for the support of their own Grandeur. I intend no more by the comparison, than only to say, That it is no Miracle, if one that finds some *Expedient very* advantagious to himself, shall endeavour to divest others from the use and benefit of it. Even the *Philosophick Adepti*, tho they pretend to the most *Flaming Charity*, deliver their Precepts under such *perplexing Ænigma's*, as if they designed to lead men into Error,

and the destruction of their Fortunes, rather than Illuminate them to the Discovery of the boasted *Elixir*. *That Interest will not lye*, is as certain as any Problem in *Euclide*; Nor is the *Jealousie* of *State* less violent than that of *Love*; nor e enduring a *Rival* to his Courtship, if he can prevent it.

Since therefore the bottom of your Enquiry seems to reach at this, what advantages a secure *Establishment* of Liberty for Tender Consciences in *England* may be attended with, in respect of the *Trade* and *Civil Happiness* of that Nation? And how far it may probably on that account Affect some of its Neighbours? I shall apply my self to give you the best satisfaction I can, wherein that I may not run into Notions meerly *speculative*; I shall insist on matter *of Fact*; for what effects it has produced, it may do again (*cæteris paribus*) and much greater, if accompanied with other more advantagious Circumstances; Nor need I step out of my *present Lodging* for an Instance.

'Tis well known, that the *free Exercise* of Religion was the best *Swadling-Band* of this *Infant Common-Wealth*; for by their Original Constitution, the *Union of Utrecht* 1579, it was provided, "That every "man should remain free in his Religion, and none "be examined or entrapped for that Cause. And the steady adherence to that *Maxim*, has mainly contributed to cherish and support them under all difficulties ever since, so that 'tis one of the Fundamental Principles of our Policy; the firmest *Pile* that bouys up our Magnificent *Stad:-House*. 'Tis *That* to which we owe our *Populousness*, and consequently our Trade, Riches and Strength; the Engine whereby we have at once *Drained* other Nations, and mounted our selves to such an Ascendent of Opulency and Power, as to vye with the most plentiful *Kingdoms* and tallest *Monarchs*.

And the Reasons thereof are no less Evident than *Universal*: For,

1. As Persecution tends to *depopulate*; so *Liberty of Conscience* naturally draws a vast Conflux of People; for as nothing can be more grievous to Honest Men, than to be restrained in *this World* from what they believe conductive to their Eternal Happiness in the *next*; so thô all have not the *Fortitude* actually to suffer in such cases, yet few want the *Prudence*, if they have the *opportunity*, to remove to a place of shelter, where they may freely enjoy those Priviledges which they are denyed at home; and for sake thereof, prefer *Wildernesses* and *Boggs*, before the most *fertile Soils*, or *pleasanteſt Climates*. Hence these *Provinces* (thô little befriended by Nature) are so full of People, that they are Calculated to have at least six Souls for every *Acre* of Land.

2. The People thus kept at home, or invited from abroad, by publick permission of *Liberty of Conscience*, are not idle *Drones* or *Spend-Thrifts*, but generally the most *Sober* and *Industrious* of any Countrey: None being more diligent in their Calling, or careful to husband their Time and Parts for publick Benefit and Improvement, than such as make Conscience of their Duty towards God; as knowing that Sloth, Gluttony, Drunkenness, Debauchery, Vain-pastimes, or Trifling Divertisements, are no less inconsistent with their Profession, than prejudicial to the Interest of any Nation.

3. Hence 'tis observed, That the most part of those *Refugies* consist of Merchants, Artificers, or Laborious Tradesmen, that like *Bees*, wherever they come, bring in Honey to the *common Hive*, by Teaching *New*, or improving *Old Manufactures* amongst those where they reside. How often has the grand staple of *Trade* been Transplanted from one place to another meerly on this occasion? The *French* and *English* Persecutions about 130 years ago, carried it to *Antwerp*; the Fury of the *Duke of Alva* forced it into these parts, whereby *Amsterdam* from a poor Fishing *Dorp*, is raised to one of the Richest Cities in the Universe; the severity of some of your *Clergy*, about half a Century past, adding not a little thereunto.

Nor want there Instances of a fresher Date; 'tis not above four or five years since several Families from the *West* and other parts of *England*, harrassed and wearied out with *Excommunications* and Forfeitures of 20 *l. per* Month, for *Nonconformity*, &c. came and planted themselves amongst us at *Lewarden* in *Friezland*, and others went higher unto *Lunenburgh*, offering to set up the *English* Manufactory for *Cloth*, *Stuffs*, *Sarges*, &c. At both places they were entertained with all the Kindness imaginable; having *Houses* allotted them *Gratis*, and great *Priviledges* granted for their Encouragement. And more of their Countrymen after *Monmouths* Rebellion (a main ground of which, as we heard here, was pretended to be for *Liberty of Conscience*) flying over, and joyning with them, they became considerable; *forty Looms* at least, being daily kept going at *Lewarden*, and a Fund of 20 or 30 *thousand Pounds* proposed to be advanc'd for carrying on the work: whereby we promised our selves no small advantages; for what with Wool privately *Stoln* from *England*, and what with *another sort* of some of our Upland Neighbours, and the plenty of *Spanish Wool* which we have here. They had got a knack of *mixing* it to as great advantage as yours; which skill our People would soon have been Masters of; and *that* could not fail of giving a fatal Blow to your Clothing Trade; and your *Hamburgh Company* began to *fear*, if not to *feel* the Consequences, especially from *Lunenburgh*, by reason of its Commodious Scituation to Intercept their Markets.

For

But the Truth is, the King of *Great Britain* was no sooner advertised hereof, but he dispatch'd accessary Orders to his *Ambassadour* then at the *Hague*, by whose Directions one *Everard* (or some such Name) was imployed, to Treat with the *Principal Undertakers*, and by assuring them, of an intire *Liberty of Conscience* at home, and *Free Pardon* to such as wanted it, prevailed with them to withdraw their *Stocks*: And so the Design *as both Places* fell to the ground; which though we may *in Interest* resent, yet none can but *in Justice*, applaude His Majesty's Conduct therein, as a Testimony of his Prudent Watchful Care, for the Welfare of his Kingdoms and People; who otherwise might have felt, the Ruinating Effects of this Accident, to after Generations.

On the other side, whereas till of late, we bought vast Quantities of *Druggets*, *Gawzes*, and other lesser *Manufactures* and *Knick-knacks* from *France*; since such Numbers of Protestants have been *forced* into these Provinces, from thence: We have made them here so plentifully, as to furnish the Markets, where there is Occasion: Nor is it probable, that *France* will ever recover that Trade again, whereby it got, perhaps more than *a Million per Annum*.

4. A Fourth Advantage of this Religious Liberty, is, That it incourages the Inhabitants of any Country, to be more *Industrious*, and more freely to venture their Stocks in Trade, being freed from Vexatious Prosecutions, Imprisonments, &c. And as (I have heard that) most of your Corporations in *England*, did not a little decline from their flourishing Condition some years since, when many of the sobrest, and most Publick-spirited Inhabitants, were by the Imposition of *Oaths* and *Tests*, debarred from all share in the Government; and by severe Prosecutions, forced to give over Trading: So the Influence thereof, we Apprehended, would have quickly affected the *whole Nation*, had not His Majesty's Wisdom interposed his late Declaration for Liberty; of which, (whatever Sentiments *our Ministers of State* may have of it) I doubt not, but you do already feel the *Happy Effects*, and would to a far greater Degree, if the same were once Established *by Law*; and the Fears, Jealousies, and Distractions of Peoples Minds, fully Cured: For which, *That* seems to be the Soveraign Remedy, and only means, to make your King the *Great Arbitrer of Europe*. For,

5. Granting *Liberty of Conscience* secures the Government, and renders it easy; takes away all Colour for Faction or Rebellion: Nothing binds more firmly than Interest, and no Interest is more strongly obliging, or more beloved, than this Freedom; and therefore ties all the Inhabitants where they have it, into a strict Fidelity to that Power which grants it, and brings every part to an intire Dependance thereon; whereas, when only *One* Perswasion is Caressed, and others (altogether as good and useful Subjects) Exposed to Losses and Punishments, for their Religion; such a Government is seldom *Quiet*, and never *Safe*: Nor does it less appease Feuds and Animosities, between the different *Sects*, amongst themselves; no man having Cause to be offended, at another Man's Liberty, because he enjoys the same himself.

The Happiness of these Provinces, in this Respect, I have seen *Elegantly* Expressed, by an Eminent Statesman of yours, formerly Ambassadour here. —*In this Common-Wealth* (says he) *no Man having Reason to complain of Oppression in Conscience, nor any Hopes, by advancing his Religion to form* a Party, *or break into the* State, The Differences in *Opinions*, make none in *Affections*, and little in *Conversation*, where it serves but for Entertainment and Variety: They argue, without *Interest* or *Anger*; They differ, without *Enmity* or *Scorn*; and they agree without Confederacy: Men live together like Citizens of the World, associated by the common Tyes of Humanity, and Bonds of Peace, under the Impartial Protection of indifferent Laws; with equal Encouragement of all Art and Industry, and equal Freedom of Speculation and Inquiry: The *Power* of Religion, where it is, lies in every Man's Heart; and where there is only the *Appearance*, it has not however so much of the *Hypocrite*, and nothing at all of that *Fierceness*, as elsewhere. But rather, in like a piece of Humanity, by which every one falls most into the Company, or Conversation of those, whose Customs and Humours, whose Talk and Disposition they like best. And as in other places, 'tis in every man's choice, with whom he will Eat or Lodge, with whom to go to *Market*, or to *Court*; so 'tis here, with whom he will Pray, or go to *Church*, or Associate in the Service and Worship of God; nor is any more Notice taken, or more *Censure* past, of what every one chuses in these Cases, than in the other.

I know not how relishing this Description may be to your coy *English Palates*; but as I can assure you, 'tis perfectly true; so to me it seems very *inviting*, much accommodate to the Civil, Quiet, and Prosperity of any Nation; and (if I mistake not) is one of the greatest *Charms*, as well as chiefest *Supports*, of this Flourishing Republick.

Now, (to turn the Tables) if the free Exercise of Religion, have been able to yield such excellent Effects in *These* Provinces; who sees not that the same firmly Established in *England*, must needs there produce far *Greater* Advantages?

For not to urge, that this Liberty is advanced amongst you, from a Nobler and more Christian *Principle*,

*tible*, and so may hope for a greater share of the Divine *Blessing*: Ours owning its Birth, only to little Accidents and great Necessity, and continued for Poucy and *Reasons of State*: Whereas, yours is the *Child of Election*, I mean, the choice of a well-informed National Judgment; drawn *Ex puris Naturalibus*, from the Limpid Streams of Primitive *Christianity*, Natural *Equity*, and *Undisturbed Reason*; Granted, not as a *Conveniency*, or an *Alms*, but a *Right*; not only, because fit in *Prudence*, but because requisite in *Piety*; nor so much for its *Advantages*, as its *Justice*: The contrary Practise being declared an Invasion on the Almighty's *Prerogative*, as well as a Tyranny over the Souls of Men. Omitting, I say, this more refined Consideration, I shall only offer, That you must needs, in meer Civil Advantages, weigh down the Ballance.

Because *England* is more aptly *Scituate*, and Accommodated for the same. For (if I may pour a *bold Truth* into the Bosom of a Friend) your happy *Brittain*, as she is the *Queen of Isles*, so seems designed by Nature, to be the *Sovereign of the Seas*, Mistress of Trade, the Grand Magazine of Commerce, and chief Empory of the World, as Enjoying,

1. *A most Excellent Temperate Air, with its Sweetness and Salubrity, inviting Strangers to a Climate, where they shall never need* Stoves *in the Winter, nor* Grotta's *in the Summer.*

2. *A large and* Plentiful Soil, (England *alone being Ten times as big as our* United Netherlands) *affording all things necessary, or commodious, for the* Life *or* Delight *of Man, and able to sustain many Hundred Thousands more of Inhabitants, than she has.*

3. *Furnish'd with divers Gallant* Navigable *Rivers abundance of safe Commodious* Harbors, *and* bold strong Ports, (*therein exceeding all her Neighbours, if not all the Countries in the World.*)

4. *Stock'd with more plenty of* Native Commodities, *and fit to be improved, into Useful and Vendible Manufactures; so that none need want* Imployment, *if they do not want* Industry.

5. *Extraordinary Plenty of* Provisions, *and those of the* Best, *and* Heartiest, *and most Substantial of your own Product: For I find it asserted, in* Notitia Anglica, *That there is yearly, as much Flesh and Beer consumed in England, by over-plentiful Tables, as would serve Three-times the Number of People. Whereas, by Computation, those Provinces are not able of themselves, to yeild Sustenance for above one* Eight part *of our Multitudes; which, together with the* Heavy Impositions *to the State, renders all Necessaries dear, and living here, very uneasy and chargable; your meanest* Boors *and* Porters, *Eating and Drinking better than our* Burghers.

From these, and many other Advantages that might be Enumerated; 'tis easy to foresee, That if *Liberty of Conscience* should be once firmly setled in *England*, it cannot fail to Attract a wonderful Concourse of Strangers, thereby greatly advancing the *Rents* of Lands and Houses, and the Prices of all sorts of *Provisions*, and consequently, a mighty Increase of *Manufactures*, *Trade* and *Riches*.

After I have said thus much, I need not add *who*, or *What* People in the World, would find themselves losers on the Foot of the Account. It being morally certain, That *Liberty of Conscience* Establish'd by Law in *England*, (adding thereto an Act for *Naturalization of Strangers*, and a *Registry* for securing the Titles of Purchases, one of the greatest *Defects* in your Nation) would more mortifie them in seven years time, than *a War* so long managed against them, with Success. And if you are pleased to believe, that they have so much *Wit*, as to understand their own *Interest*, it will appear no wonder, if they make use of all the Arts they can, to prevent such Consequences.

Which, without the help of an *Oedipus*, may bid fair for the Salving the Riddle of your *first Enquiry*: But having wearied you with a *Tedious Letter*, 'tis time I beg your Pardon, and intreat you to take the *Liberty* I have used herein, as a *further Argument*, that I am *altogether*

Amsterdam, April 27. S. N. 1688.

*Your most Humble, and Affectionate Servant,*

C. D. W.

Cornelius de

Printed with Allowance, for *E. R.* 1688.